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AUTHOR Hoadley, Jack
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ABSTRACT

Based on insights gained from an Australian program of adult migrant English language education, it is argued that independent learning centers (ILCs) can be effective in assisting adult learners to develop both independent learning skills and language skills. The principles of independent learning and contemporary understanding about learning styles and strategies as a conceptual foundation for ILC establishment are reviewed. Recent research on adult learning, autonomous learning, self-directed learning, and self-instruction is surveyed. Six program models are outlined, including the study, withdrawal, programmed learning, drop-in, self-directed learning, and learning resource centers. The models are contrasted, using examples of ILCs operating in Australia in 1989 and the findings are summarized. Consideration of the ways of supporting the learner in self-instruction then leads to a specification of the role and function of ILCs for adults. A discussion of practical implications for ILC operation addresses issues of staffing and provision of appropriate materials. Directions for the future are examined. (Author/MSE)

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TOWARDS INDEPENDENT LEARNING

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Jack Hoadley
Educational Consultant

Hoadley Education Services
2/15 Hill St.
Hawthorn, 3122
AUSTRALIA

FL019207

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ABSTRACT

TOWARDS INDEPENDENT LEARNING

From a statement of the case for Independent Learning a rationale for Individual Learning Centres (ILCs) is established. A review of the principles of independent learning and the contemporary understanding of learning styles and strategies is used to formulate a conceptual foundation for the establishment of ILCs. Recent research regarding adult learning, autonomous learning, self-directed learning and self-instruction is surveyed. Building on a learner-centred philosophy, six different models of ILC's are then presented: Study Centre; Withdrawal Centre; Programmed Learning Centre; Drop-in Centre; Self-directed Learning Centre; and Learning Resource Centre.

These models are then contrasted with examples of ILCs operating in Australia in 1989 when they were reviewed. The key findings of the Review are then summarised. Consideration of ways of supporting the learner in self-instruction leads to a specification of the role and function of ILCs for adults.

Discussion of the practical implications of the Review for the operation of ILCs includes several matters relating to staffing and appropriate materials. In conclusion, the paper presents a vision for the future development of Individual Learning Centres.

TOWARDS INDEPENDENT LEARNING

Jack Hoadley
Educational Consultant

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Overview

This paper presents some of the insights gained from a review of Individual Learning Centres (ILC)[1] in the Australian Adult Migrant English Program[2] (AMEP) carried out in 1989. It argues that ILCs can be effective in assisting adult language learners to develop both their independent learning skills and their language skills.

1.2 Why Independent Learning?

The AMEP is a available to all recent adult migrants to Australia. Its budget for the current financial year 1990/91 is approximately $AU83 million and in 1990 it catered for approximately 70,000 clients. It aims to enable its clients to develop their English to such a level that they can begin to take their place in the Australian community. The AMEP Mission Statement (1989) reads

> "In accord with the economic and social objectives of the Australian Government's Migration Program the AMEP will provide English language teaching and related services to recently arrived migrants to help them function effectively in Australian society and to acquire the language skills they need to achieve their goals". (DILGEA, 1989:5)

Each adult migrant has a limited entitlement which they are currently being encouraged to use within three to five years of their arrival in the country. It is therefore imperative that these students can continue their language learning and skill development after they have exited the program. For these reasons the AMEP hold learner autonomy as a goal.

The AMEP also maintains a 'learner-centred' philosophy. The AMEP's clients, as adults, have the responsibility for setting their own goals and disciplining themselves to achieve those goals. As described by Stevick (1976), to be 'learner-centred' means that the emphasis of learning is on the learner and not on the teacher; that learning comes about by the efforts of the individual learner.

1. Report of the Review was published by the Department of Immigration, Local Government and Ethnic Affairs (DILGEA), Canberra, in 1990.
2. Formerly known as the Adult Migrant Education Program

This is not to say that a 'teacher-centred' philosophy is necessarily wrong. For some clients, there may be occasions in their learning program when 'teacher-directed' activities are appropriate. However, the Program tries to resist the temptation to cultivate 'teacher-dependence' and to keep the ultimate goal of 'independence' in adult learning of English language in view.

The AMEP National Plan 1990-92 reinforces this point. It states that the major objective of the AMEP is

> "to provide learning activities to enable clients to reach proficiency levels consistent with their educational, vocational and social goals and to acquire the skills to learn English autonomously"(DILGEA 1989:11).

Nunan summarises the philosophy of the Program:

> "1. To enable learners to gain enough English to function in the community, to acquire the skills necessary to become independent and autonomous learners, and to develop sufficient English to gain access to educational and other community services.
>
> "2. To develop learning arrangements which encourage self-help, individualisation and promote a view of language as a tool for achieving life goals rather than as an end in itself.
>
> "3. To develop a methodology which takes a functional approach to language, exploits 'authentic' materials, sees genuine interaction outside the classroom as essential to language development, familiarises learners with Australian culture, is based on learner needs, establishes clear objectives, capitalises on learning strategies already acquired by learners, and encourages self-reliance and self-assessment" Nunan (1986:1).

This is a description of a learner-centred philosophy. The AMEP's clients are adults who are expected to have an active rather than a passive role and to undertake certain responsibilities for their own learning.

This 'learner-centred' philosophy is founded on the conviction that:

(1) autonomous learning is a desirable outcome of learning in the AMEP because the students are enabled to go on learning on their own;

(2) adults bring with them variety in their experience of life which provide them with some insight into their own learning needs, some understanding of effective learning processes and some of the self-discipline necessary to be an autonomous learner;

(3) individual students vary in their cognitive and learning styles and hence require student-centred educational processes which will involve 'individualisation'.

Consequently, the AMEP aims to develop autonomous learners and therefore seeks to develop learning skills alongside language skills.

1.3 What is meant by 'Autonomous' Learning?

Dickinson (1987:11) uses the term 'autonomy' to describe

> "the situation in which the learner is totally responsible for all of the decisions concerned with his learning and the implementation of those decisions. In full autonomy there is no involvement of the 'teacher' or an institution. And the learner is also independent of specially prepared materials."

Boud (1988) sees autonomy as a goal of education, an ideal to which learners or teachers may wish to aspire and as an educational approach which emphasises 'learner-independence' and responsibility for decision making. An 'autonomous learner' is clearly an 'independent learner'.

To achieve this goal, Boud argues that a learner will need the assistance of a teacher, helper, facilitator or counsellor. But learners will only begin to approach autonomy when they are able to make decisions about what should be learned and when they know how to go about learning.

1.4 Why Individual Learning Centres?

These two concepts - 'individualisation' and 'autonomy'- find practical expression in the idea of an ILC.

An ILC is a facility which contains:

* instructional materials which have been specially prepared for students working alone;
* books and reference material;
* audio-visual software such as audio-cassettes, video-cassettes, and computers;
* equipment for using these resources;
* individual work stations;
* staff work station(s);
* storage and records/administration area.

It may also include facilities for:

* group use of the audio-visual software;
* group conversation.

The ILC is designed to assist the student's development towards autonomy while specifically addressing their need for individualisation. The ILC can therefore be seen as a bridge or a stepping stone from:

* group-focussed to individualised instruction;
* teacher-centred to learner-centred curriculum;
* teacher-dependence to autonomy;
* classroom to outside world;

1.5 What is an Individual Learning Centre?

For the purposes of this paper the definition of an ILC as set out in the AMEP Handbook has been adopted:

> "Individual Learning Centres provide opportunity for students to independently pursue learning activities and practise language skills according to their own requirements, at the times and at a pace of their choice, with the guidance of a teacher" (DIEA 1985:7).

This definition embraces facilities which may be known as:

* individual study centre;
* independent learning centre;
* self-access centre;
* self-directed learning centre.

Thus the functions of an ILC may vary from centre to centre but they all aim to cater for **adult** learners of English as a Second Language (ESL) on an **individual** basis. The key operating principles of an ILC relate the interaction between the ILC teacher and the learner; the design of the materials to make them suitable for self instruction; and the organisation of the learning materials to facilitate access.

1.6 Review of ILCs in the AMEP

The Review was commissioned in 1989 by the Department of Immigration, Local Government and Ethnic Affairs as part of a cyclic 5-yearly evaluative process which examines each of the AMEP's components or learning arrangements. These include:

* Formal English classes;
* English in the Workplace;
* Tutor Support Schemes;
* Distance Learning;
* Individual Learning.

There were 47 ILCs operating under the aegis of the AMEP in the states and territories in 1989. 4568 students were enrolled in these ILCs in the period I July 1989 to 30 September 1989. The first of these ILCs was developed as the 1970s ended by a Sydney classroom teacher who was seeking more effective ways to individualise his teaching of reading and writing. At about the same time teachers in other states began to experiment in parallel ways. In 1981, State Coordinators of Teacher Development met to discuss the implications of adopting the principle of individualising instruction. The concept of learner autonomy became a keystone of the AMEP and the need for Self-Access Centres was recognised. During the succeeding years the Australian Government funded the establishment of a number of centres and also conferences and symposia on the principles and practice of self-directed learning and self-access. By the end of the 1980s the number of ILCs had burgeoned. They had evolved in different ways generally reflecting the inspiration, educational philosophy and commitment of their founding teachers. One of the tasks of the Review was to map the current operations of ILCs across the nation.

2. PRINCIPLES OF INDEPENDENT LEARNING

2.1 Adult Learning Principles

Given that the AMEP has a particular brief to cater for adults, it is important that the 'learner-centred philosophy' is matched with an understanding of the difference between pedagogy and andragogy in establishing the most effective learning environment for its clients. The principles of adult learning comprise one 'building block' which must be underpin the development of ILCs.

Adult migrant students bring with them a collection of internal resources. It is the role of the ILC to support them and help them to utilise these inner resources in ways which will most effectively progress their language learning. Derived from the work of Brundage and Mackeracher (1980), Nunan and Burton distilled the following adult learning principles when formulating the basis of the Australian Adult Migrant English Program's series of Curriculum Frameworks :

* Adult behaviour is not fixed, but changes in response to both internal and external pressures. Adults can and do learn throughout their entire lifetime;
* Adults enter learning activities with an organised set of descriptions and feeling about themselves which influence the learning process;
* The past experience an adult learner brings to any learning activity is both a helpful resource for further learning and an unavoidable potential hindrance;
* Part of the adult learner's past experience is organised and integrated into his self-concept and self-esteem. Adults with a positive self-concept and high self-esteem are more responsive to learning and less threatened by learning environments and the process of change;
* When past experience can be applied directly to current experience, learning is facilitated;
* Past experience becomes increasingly important as an adult grows older;
* Adult learning tends to concentrate on the problems, concerns, tasks and needs of the individual's current life situation;
* Any group of adult learners will be, to some extent, heterogeneous in terms of learning and cognitive styles (Nunan and Burton (Coordinators) 1989).

2.2 Learning Styles and Strategies

In seeking to apply these principles it is necessary to recognise that learners differ in the way they like to learn. An individual's type of mental processing is recognised by some writers as his/her 'cognitive or learning style'. Willing identified the following factors as influencing a person's preferred learning style:

"- the individual's innate psychological make-up;
- particular up-bringing and socio-cultural background;
- schooling in general;
- previous educational experiences in the particular subject matter in question; and
- the person's perception's of (his)/her deficits and weak points, as well as strengths and talents" (Willing 1985a).

In a 'Learning Styles' Project carried out by the Adult Migrant English Service in N.S.W. (Australia), Willing (1985d) found four distinct learner types. These can be summarised as:

* The 'Communicative Learner' who likes to learn by using every opportunity in his/her everyday life as a chance to learn and practice English;
* The 'Authority-oriented Learner' who prefers teacher guidance, formal texts and a step-by-step approach;

* The 'Concrete Learner' who likes learning under the direction of a teacher, but who also enjoys taking part in a variety of learning activities based on the use of audio-visual materials. He/she is also willing to participate in 'authentic' English-speaking situations;
* The 'Analytical Learner' who likes to study in a 'formal', structured way but prefers to take his/her own initiative in the learning process.

While recognising that more factual information about learner preferences was needed in order to formulate some hypotheses which correlate factors like age, cultural and educational background, and functional needs, Willing concluded that

> "it is evident that ... an extremely 'holistic' learner will neither enjoy nor benefit from a highly analytical approach, such as one requiring her or him to induce grammatical rules; it can also be predicted that a very analytical learner will dislike any method which is too free-floating, too communicative', and does not pin down the language act to intelligible principles" (Willing 1985c:112).

A learner uses learning strategies to gain control of information input. The term 'learning strategy' is used to embrace the many techniques and methods, both cognitive and practical, which the learner may use to process this information. Willing also identified several specific strategy areas including:

> "... selectively attending, associating, recognising and learning pattern, categorising, and inferencing. These are broad names for the fundamental cognitive acts necessary to control and manage information, thereby rendering that information assimilable. Other identified strategies of learning (e.g. planning, practising, utilising communicative situations, monitoring or evaluating) also can be said to 'manage information', in that they exercise control over the learning process as a whole" (Willing 1988:139).

Understanding different learning styles and strategies is the second 'building block' on which the operation of an ILC must be built.

2.3 Self-instruction

Understanding the concept of 'self-instruction' is the third important 'building block' to be incorporated into the operation of an ILC. Self-instruction, as used by Dickinson (1987:11), refers to "situations in which learners are working without the direct control of the teacher." For the purposes of this paper, 'self-instruction' is used to include all the variations of individual learning along the continuum between teacher-dependence and autonomous learning.

Self-instruction may take the form of Self-access Learning, Programmed Learning, Distance Education or Individualisation (where the learning process is adapted to the needs of each individual). As stressed by Holec these modes of learning share the common feature of not requiring the teacher to be constantly present, but provide only limited freedom for students to control their learning programs - i.e. the aims, content, methods and evaluation may all be predetermined.

Self-directed Learning is a mode of self-instruction where the learner receives counselling from a teacher but takes responsibility for such component of the learning program as objectives, content, method, time, pace and evaluation.

Students engaging in self-instruction will be learning independently but can be expected to be at different stages along the progression towards autonomy. As the learners take over responsibility for their mode of learning and choose a form of self-instruction, they take over part, or all, of the instructional process without the direct intervention of the teacher. (Dickinson 1987:15)

3. MODELS OF ILCs

3.1 ILCs and Independent Learning

Different students can be catered for in different ways. In the process of carrying out the Review of ILCs, six different theoretical models of ILCs were constructed to illustrate the variations which are possible as valid means of assisting students to engage in self-instruction. The purpose of the models was to provide a tool for the analysis of the ways in which the operating ILCs in the AMEP endeavoured to cater for their students. The relationship between the models and the actual operating ILCs enabled clarification of directions for the future development of them.

Each of the models is directed towards the goal of autonomy and incorporates the principles of independent learning outlined above. The differences in these models reflect the differences in the degree of teacher-dependence and the degree of student decision-making involved. The models are:

1. ILC as Study Centre;
2. ILC as Withdrawal Centre;
3. ILC as Programmed Learning Centre;
4. ILC as Drop-in Centre;
5. ILC as Self-directed Learning Centre
6. ILC as Learning Resource Centre.

Each of these models assumes that the ILC:

* operates in a separate room;
* is established with individual learning materials;
* possesses a range of different types of equipment;
* is fitted with appropriate furniture; and
* it is managed by a teacher trained in ESL.

Furthermore, the models assume the materials are specifically designed for self-instruction in that the language content is broken down into manageable segments and complemented by:

* clear but simple instructions;
* relevant knowledge and skill development exercises with self-correction keys; and
* a style of presentation which is attractive.

These six models represent different points along the continuum of learning independence. Model 1 allows the student to work at their own pace but retains the centrality of the teacher. At the other end of the continuum, Model 6 enables the student to work autonomously. Table 1 is a decision chart which reveals the essential differences between these six Models. 17 questions were devised to distinguish between the them.

3.2 Model 1 - ILC as Study Centre

Classes are timetabled for a limited number of hours each week under the supervision of the classroom teacher and hence attendance is restricted to the timetabled times. Students work on materials selected by themselves or by the classroom teacher who provides the intensive one-to-one tuition tailored to each student's need. There are induction sessions for new clients including guidance to locating suitable materials.

Students do not need access to a catalogue of materials or a guide to locating materials and they can study quite satisfactorily with some tuition in self-directed learning strategies provided they are able to call on the classroom teacher when they encounter difficulties. The learning experiences and the range of materials in the ILC may be expected to be narrowly focussed on the language level and orientation of the classes conducted by the Teaching Centre. The fundamental purpose of the ILC as Study Centre is to complement the classroom learning by enabling the individual student to work on identified needs at his/her own pace.

Table 2.1: Decision Table for Models of Individual Learning Centres

CHARACTERISTICS OF ILCs	1 STUDY CENTRE	2 WITHDRAWAL CENTRE	3 PROGRAM LEARNING	4 DROP-IN CENTRE	5 SELF-DIRECTED LEARNING	6 LRC/ LIBRARY
1 Is the classroom teacher available to help clients?	yes	no	no	no	no	no
2 Are the students enrolled in a class?	yes	yes	no	no	no	no
3 Are the classroom students required to attend during class time?	yes	yes	no	no	no	no
4 Is the ILC teacher expected to provide intensive 1:1 tuition in language learning?	yes	yes	no	yes	yes	no
5 Is the range of learning opportunities/materials narrowly focussed?	yes	yes	yes	no	no	no
6 Are induction sessions for new clients considered essential?	yes	yes	yes	yes	no	no
7 Is there provision for small group activities?	yes	no	no	yes	yes	no
8 Is it essential for the ILC teacher to be available to help students select materials?	no	yes	no	yes	no	no
9 Is an ILC teacher expected to monitor the progress of clients?	no	yes	no	yes	no	no
10 Is an ILC teacher available to help students manage their own learning?	no	yes	yes	yes	no	no
11 Is it essential that the materials are designed for self-instruction?	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	no
12 Can the student attend the ILC at any time during opening hours?	no	no	yes	yes	yes	yes
13 Does the student require access to a catalogue or a guide to using the ILC?	no	no	yes	no	yes	yes
14 Is the student expected to select/choose the materials from the collection?	no	no	no	yes	yes	yes
15 Does an ESL teacher provide intensive 1:1 tuition in learning strategies?	no	no	no	yes	yes	no
16 Is the client expected to make a regular appointment with a Self-directed Learning counsellor?	no	no	no	no	yes	no
17 Are clients able to borrow materials?	no	no	no	no	no	yes

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3.3 Model 2 - ILC as Withdrawal Centre

Students are withdrawn from class to work in the ILC under the supervision of the ILC teacher. Attendance is restricted to times mutually convenient to classroom and ILC teachers. The ILC provides an opportunity for the student to work at his/her own pace while developing specified skills or overcoming particular difficulties. The ILC provides specialist remedial teaching. The ILC teacher chooses the materials and provides the intensive one-to-one tuition essential for the student's learning to progress. The learning experiences and the range of materials in the ILC may be expected to be narrowly focussed and tailored to its remedial character in supporting the different programs offered by the Teaching Centre. Students do not need access to a catalogue of materials or a guide to locating suitable materials and they can study quite satisfactorily without tuition in self-directed learning strategies provided they are able to call on the ILC teacher when they encounter difficulties. The primary goal of the ILC as Withdrawal Centre is to remedy the deficiencies in the language competence of formal classroom learners.

3.4 Model 3 - ILC as Programmed Learning Centre

The ILC is structured around a written program which enables the student to decide which materials to select to help with recognised learning needs. This program consists of a series of steps, each one involving a group of diagnostic questions and a limited number of choices to select materials designed to reinforce recent learning or progress to new areas of study. In a Programmed Learning Centre, the materials have been effectively preselected by the program designer and presented as a limited number of options. Once the operation of the ILC has been explained in the induction session, the student follows the program decision tree, working independently but able to consult the ILC teacher if necessary. Here again the range of materials in the ILC may be expected to be narrowly focussed in response to the written programs available. Students do not need access to a catalogue of materials as the program provides the guide to suitable materials and they can study without tuition in self-directed learning strategies. The essential role of the Programmed Learning Centre is to provide a course of language development which is not classroom dependent.

3.5 Model 4 - ILC as Drop-in Centre

The ILC provides a wide range of activities and resources which have been carefully designed to be readily accessible to clients who may choose to attend at their convenience. Activities may involve individual work in listening, reading or writing exercises; or small group work as for conversation practice, video watching; or computer aided language learning. Following the induction session in which the operation of the centre is explained, the student selects the activity and the materials appropriate to his/her learning needs. Students need the assistance of written guides to locate suitable resources but an ILC teacher is also available to assist their choosing through diagnosis of needs and presentation of options for materials to work on. The ILC teacher also assists clients to understand and develop their preferred learning strategies. The intrinsic role of the ILC as Drop-in Centre is to offer a variety of options for individual clients to progress in their language development.

3.6 Model 5 - ILC as Self-directed Learning Centre

The essence of the ILC as Self-directed Learning Centre is the presentation of its resources so that they can be selected by the student for use in the centre. Students attend the centre at times convenient to themselves. Clients need access to a written guide or directory to using the ILC and to the catalogue of materials. Following the induction session in which the operation of the centre is explained, the student selects the activity and the materials appropriate to his/her learning needs and is supported by regular sessions with a self-directed learning counsellor designed to assist the student explore and develop learning strategies appropriate to his/her learning needs. Such intensive one-to-one counselling may also involve problem diagnosis, assistance with language difficulties, suggestions for suitable materials, and monitoring of client progress. A fundamental purpose of the ILC as Self-directed Learning Centre is to assist the client towards independence in language learning through a semi-autonomous learning environment.

3.7 Model 6 - ILC as Learning Resource Centre

The ILC as Learning Resource Centre aims to provide as wide a range of equipment and materials as possible for individual use within or outside the centre. It is built on the expectation that it will be used by autonomous learners who know their preferred learning strategies and are seeking resources with which to pursue their personal goals. Clients will need access to the catalogue of materials though the LRC will be staffed by a librarian skilled in locating resources in response to the requests of individual clients. Borrowing rights will be available. The primary function of the ILC as Learning Resource Centre is the provision of language learning resources for use by individual clients.

3.8 Types of ILCs Operating in Australia

Using the seventeen questions which define the characteristics of ILCs, as listed in Section 3.1 above, the analysis of the 47 ILCs enabled a classification of centres. Based on this typology there were:

Drop-In Centres	19
Study Centres	2
Withdrawal Centres	1
Programmed Learning Centres	1
Drop-In/Study Centres	6
Drop-In/Withdrawal Centres	4
Drop-In/Learning Resource Centres	5
Study/Learning Resource Centres	1
Self-directed Learning/Learning Resource Centres	1
Self-directed Learning/Withdrawal Centres	1
Drop-In/Study/Learning Resource Centres	2
Drop-In/Withdrawal/Learning Resource Centres	1
Drop-In/Self-directed Learning/Learning Resource Centres	1
Study/Self-directed Learning/Learning Resource Centres	2

Two points need to be made:

(1) Thirty-eight of the 47 centres (81%) were derived from the Drop-in Centre model and thirteen centres (28%) were derivatives of the Study Centre model; and

(2) Twenty-four of the 47 centres (51%) attempted to function on more than one model with serious implications for the effectiveness of their operation.

4. ROLE AND FUNCTION OF ILCs FOR ADULT LANGUAGE LEARNING

In the context of the Australian Adult Migrant English Program, the Review team concluded that the role of the ILCs is to facilitate self-instruction in the English language and to promote progress towards autonomous adult learning in its clients.

ILCs should have three complementary functions. To be an educational resource designed to:

(1) assist clients through the transition from teacher-dependence to independence in language learning;

(2) cater for varying cognitive and learning styles; and

(3) provide for the needs of clients who are already confident, self-directed learners;

ILCs may carry out this role by:

(1) Complementing formal classroom teaching as in the *Study Centre, Withdrawal Centre* or *Programmed Learning Centre* models; and

(2) Providing tuition for clients unable or not desiring to attend classes as in the *Drop-In Centre, Self-directed Learning Centre* or *Learning Resource Centre* models.

5. KEY FINDINGS OF THE REVIEW OF ILCs IN THE AMEP

5.1 Most Significant Contributors to the Effectiveness of ILCs

In the Review's interviews and group discussions, clients consistently singled out the interaction with the ILC teacher as the most significant factor in their learning experience in the ILC. They mentioned the importance of a friendly, caring and dedicated teacher who understands the problems they were encountering in their learning. Others identified specific areas where the teacher's help had been significant - clarifying goals, setting up equipment, correcting work, explaining difficulties, encouraging homework, sorting out settlement issues, and conversing in English.

Teachers who were interviewed expressed similar views and some stressed the importance of understanding the learning process and being trained in the skills required for developing self-directed learners. Others noted the need to be able to establish one-to-one relationships quickly or to incorporate plenty of 'chat' time as a means towards building useful working relationships. Some teachers emphasised the importance of establishing a program for the client to follow indicating materials expected to be helpful.

A variety of appropriate, relevant material was, of course, critical to the success of ILCs, but they must be designed for self-instruction and preferably graded, coded and arranged for self access. Students, generally, found the packet combinations of text and cassette tape were very helpful. Some referred to the value of the bilingual dictionaries, language masters, and books or videos on Australia.

For effective use of the ILC, program managers and ILC teachers, considered students must have knowledge about working independently and understand the purpose of the ILC. The interviews with students indicated that insufficient time was devoted to ensuring these two principles were implemented in many ILCs.

The teachers who were considered to be well trained and experienced in managing an ILC gave particular significance to training clients in self-instruction. They indicated that this requires inducting students into the way an ILC works and the principles of self-instruction, as well as training them in using the equipment, locating materials, and progressive self-assessment. Furthermore, they said it often requires demystifying the learning process by teaching clients 'to learn how to learn', to explore alternative learning strategies, and to discover their own preferred learning style. It also involved helping students discover that they can enjoy learning in this individual way. The clients who were interviewed were very appreciative of the opportunity to study in this way, or as one student said *"to be able to meet my need and concentrate on my interest"*. Many referred appreciatively to the range of options available to them; to be able to make their own choice of material; to be able to work at their own pace until they felt they understood; or to be able to study methodically.

Teachers stressed the importance of the working environment. It needs to be pleasant, comfortable, supportive and arranged so that the materials are attractively displayed. It also needs to be friendly and characterised by the personal touch. In one large centre, the ILC-aide seemed to welcome every client by name on entering the ILC. In some ILCs, coffee making facilities were considered to be an essential focus for social interaction and an encouragement for self-management of time in their learning.

5.2 Hindrances to Effective Learning in the ILC

The most significant impediment revealed by the Review was the identity crisis created by the confusion over the model of operation adopted by approximately half of the ILCs. As noted in Section 3.8 above, 24 centres were classified as attempting to operate across two or more models. These multi-operational modes put their staff under additional strain because each model requires the ILC teacher to carry out their functions in a somewhat different way. The level of strain was noticeably higher where the teachers were not clear about the model on which they were operating and this ambiguity resulted in a less effective activity.

At approximately twenty-five per cent of the centres visited, the clients drew attention to the poor working environment caused by overcrowding and lack of ventilation. (Some of these rooms had very few or no external windows). In some centres, students requested separate rooms for noisy activities such as group work associated with conversation classes, video viewing or computer interaction. In a small number of centres, clients expressed their frustration with the restricted hours during which the ILC was open.

In several centres, clients commented that they found the teacher was often too busy working with other students when they wanted assistance and suggested that the ILC was under-staffed.

Some Teaching Centres had adopted the practice of staffing their ILC by 'topping up' several teachers' loads with a few hours duty in the ILC. Some other centres cycle teachers through the ILC for short periods giving them a break from their classroom responsibilities. Such 'rest-cures' devalued the ILC in the eyes of the teaching staff and denied the need to develop the special skills required. Many clients commented that their ILC would have been better if one teacher had been consistently present in the centre.

With regard to materials students considered the effectiveness of ILCs was hindered by:

* poor quality equipment and tapes in poor condition;
* lack of multiple copies of material;
* limited number of bilingual materials;
* limited materials relating to specific occupations;
* not enough bilingual dictionaries;
* inadequate range of materials;
* out of date materials;
* insufficient tapes with deliberately slow speech;
* lack of cataloguing systems to allow student access.

5.3 Types of Client Best Suited to Learning in an ILC

There was consensus amongst all staff interviewed that ILC clients need to be highly motivated and committed to self-instructional learning and hence to be prepared to take responsibility for their own learning and confident to take charge of it. A small number of teachers suggested that the ILC better suits clients with an analytical turn of mind or an attitude of seeking and discovery backed by resourcefulness. There was also general agreement that clients with pre-existing learning strategies/study skills, who know how to learn and are self-directed, will progress quickly in the ILC. These clients were also considered likely to be well educated in their country of origin. Teachers claimed that their ILCs were generally successful with overseas trained professionals or other technically qualified personnel who were preparing to enter the workforce in Australia.

Most teachers considered there were some students for whom the ILC was inappropriate. In their view, the ILC as a Learning Arrangement should not be offered to clients who:

* need close supervision and are determinedly teacher-dependent;
* need the discipline provided by formal classroom learning;
* need constant social interaction;
* are emotionally disturbed;
* are unmotivated when working alone.

But at this point the consensus ended. While some staff argued that, depending on the resources of the ILC, it could cater for all types of students, others disagreed. Some considered that clients who were illiterate in their first language (L1), or with only a low level of education in their country of origin, would be inappropriately placed in an ILC where negotiating the print medium is fundamental to the learning process. Others believed their ILC could cater for such clients, but, they acknowledged that such students demanded considerable one-to-one tuition if their time in the ILC to be effective. Several ILC teachers provided examples of successful learning by students with low levels of literacy in their first language but stressed that a high level of motivation in the student and a high level of teacher support was required. Low levels of English proficiency were not considered to be as difficult a barrier if bilingual materials and bilingual assistance was available, though lengthy one-to-one tuition was also required.

6. PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS FOR THE OPERATION OF ILCs

6.1 Staffing

It is clear that the role of the teacher is critical. Teachers need to be well-trained and experienced and to understand clearly the differences between student-centred and teacher-centred learning and between learning in the individual-mode and in the classroom-mode. They need to be available, empathic, and committed. ILC-teachers should be seen as resource persons or facilitators who can provide educational counselling, assistance with goal setting and the selection of materials, support for independent learning strategies, and who monitor student progress.

The teacher in an ILC does not have an easy job. It requires considerable skill to help a client move from dependence to independence. They need to have a range of alternative teaching strategies which they can tailor to suit different clients. They cannot rely on the 'sink or swim' strategy to be an effective way to encourage independence.

The ILC teacher needs to know how to induct new learners to the philosophy underlying the concept of individual learning and the expectations of clients studying in an ILC; to get them started in a way which leads quickly to recognisable learning; to developing in each student alternative learning strategies; and when to intervene in the students' learning or when to hold back.

As teachers work with students, the need for some materials not held in the collection will become apparent. Teachers require time to be able to locate and acquire existing materials or to develop new materials. Therefore, ILCs should be adequately staffed with professional and support staff to enable teachers to respond to such needs. The hours of opening may need to be restricted so that teachers can concentrate on developing new materials during an uninterrupted period.

It follows that the ILC-teacher needs to be thoroughly trained in the processes of student-centred learning, the teaching of alternative learning strategies and the practices for developing self-directed learning. Carefully tailored in-service programs for ILC-teachers need to be available if their centres are to be as effective as possible.

As indicated in Section 5.2 above, lack of staffing continuity is detrimental. Each ILC requires at least one specialist teacher who can concentrate on implementing the processes of individual and independent learning and that they should hold such an appointment for at least two years.

6.2 Materials

The ILC principles which reflect the AMEP philosophy (as outlined by Nunan in Section 1.2 above) have practical implications for the design of ILC materials.

Individualisation: To cater for adult learners with different learning styles, ILC materials must offer choices. Choices of content related to a specified learning goal, and choices of learning style.

Autonomy: Materials designed to develop independence will include explicit statements of:-

* objectives - what the materials aim to assist the learner to achieve;
* orientation - explanation of what the learner may expect from the materials
* input - new information and explanation;
* tasks - exercises to consolidate the learning or develop skills;
* feedback - assessment and reinforcement of what has been achieved and referral-on to other appropriate materials.

An ILC will also contain materials which equip students with the skills required to use resources more widely available in the community. These will include use of:

* tools such as dictionaries, directories, telephone books, entertainment guides;
* materials designed to show students how they can develop their own exercises from radio, TV or print media.

Self-instruction: ILC materials must teach not just test. Many classroom materials are entirely inappropriate because they rely on the teacher to provide the language input and then they test whether the students have understood it, or not. This is appropriate in the classroom but useless in an ILC. Testing exercises can only be used as diagnostic tools in ILCs. They must then lead to materials which can provide the appropriate input for the learner.

7. VISION FOR THE FUTURE DEVELOPMENT OF ILCs

ILCs in the Australian AMEP are an educational resource designed to:

(1) assist clients through the transition from teacher-dependence to independence in language learning;

(2) cater for varying cognitive and learning styles; and

(3) provide for the needs of clients who are already confident, self-directed learners.

Furthermore, when located within a Teaching Centre, ILCs have the potential to become the 'powerhouse' from which motivating ideas, theories and practical techniques of individualised language learning are distributed throughout the Centre infusing all of its learning activities. Mainstream programs and their administration may then be transformed more effectively into client-centred Learning Arrangements. Larger numbers of students will then be encouraged to progress along the path towards independent learning.

Within this expanded concept of an ILC, the roles of ILC teachers and classroom teachers will be both complementary and interdependent. All teachers will be working from a common philosophical commitment to client-centred learning and striving towards a common goal - i.e. achieving independent language learners. The ILC teacher will possess a sound understanding of the educational principles of self-directed learning and be equipped with the skills for counselling students as well as the techniques for intervention in the learning process in a constructive way.

This is not to downgrade the role of the classroom teacher. That there is a time and place for teacher-centred learning methodology is acknowledged. During the early stages of development towards autonomy, some adult students will possess a learning style which is teacher-dependent and the importance of such students being matched with similarly styled teaching is recognised. That some teachers have a preferred teaching style which is highly directive and teacher-focussed and that many clients respond well in their classrooms is also acknowledged. Just as it is important for students to understand their preferred learning style, so it is imperative for teachers to possess the self-awareness to know their preferred teaching-style and how they can best contribute in assisting students to move along this continuum. Teachers need to maintain their personal integrity and be able to teach their courses with honesty and appropriateness. Hence there is a place for teachers with an autocratic or teacher-centred teaching style to be responsible for classes which are not 'exit-courses'- i.e. the final course before the student moves out of the AMEP and becomes dependent on their own and the community's resources.

Classroom learning will continue to be a major component of any language teaching program. In this vision for the future development of ILCs, the role of the ILC teacher will be that of a specialist who facilitates the development of autonomous learners, primarily, through individual educational counselling and tuition. The complementary role of the classroom teacher will be that of the specialist who facilitates the development of autonomous learners, primarily, in group situations. Where both operate on a client-centred model of learning, clients will be assisted to move from dependence towards independence. As they do this, they may be expected to draw on the skills of the ILC teacher or the classroom-teacher at different times and in different ways to meet their immediate but changing needs.

A Teaching Centre that is philosophically committed to promoting autonomous learning and is practically integrated towards this end may be expected to relate more closely the functions and operations of its library and its ILC. Within this concept, the ILC may be expected to:

* provide a teacher or teachers with the educational expertise to counsel or guide clients (individual or class-room learners) through the transition to self-directed-learning;
* provide the facilities, equipment and materials designed for self-instruction;
* provide materials which help students to recognise learning opportunities from the community around them;
* enable clients to locate and use materials appropriate for their needs;
* ensure that all equipment and materials are kept in a satisfactory condition; and
* be easily accessible and open at times convenient to the majority of clients.

8. CONCLUSION

Individual Learning Centres are capable of being valuable vehicles for assisting adult students to become more independent in their language learning. In Australia they are making an important contribution to the aims of the AMEP as they assist learners towards autonomy through individualisation and self-instruction with a 'real world' orientation.

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